UMMUL MOMINEEN

SAFIYA

BINT HUYYAY

صفية بِنت حُيَيْ رضئ الله تعالى عنها

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UMMUL MOMINEEN SAFIYA BINT HUYYAY

(رضئ الله تعالى عنہا)

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بِسم الله الرحمنِ الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام
على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين

UMMUL MOMINEEN SAFIYYAH BINT HUYAYY (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا)

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

In the oasis city of Yathrib—later known as Madinah al-Munawwarah—a child was born into one of the most powerful Jewish tribes of Arabia. Her name was Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, and she was destined to travel a path few could have imagined: from nobility to captivity, from grief to faith, and finally to the inner sanctum of the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) household.

Her father, Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, was the chief of Banu al-Naḍir, one of the three major Jewish tribes that had long been settled in Madinah. These tribes held significant influence over the religious, economic, and social life of the city. Her family traced its ancestry back to Prophet Haroon (عليه السلام), brother of Musa (عليه السلام), making Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) a descendant of the Levitical priesthood, a lineage regarded with great reverence among the Jewish people.

Born into the environment of tribal power, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) would have received a cultured upbringing, familiar with Hebrew scripture, oral tradition, and the deeply rooted identity of a people waiting for a promised prophet. Her father was a respected leader and theologian, though known for his deep hostility toward Islam when it first emerged in Madinah.

It is reported in Ibn Sa'd's Tabaqat and al-Ṭabari's Tarikh that Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا), even as a child, witnessed her father and uncle debating the signs of prophethood in Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) after his migration to Madinah. In a famous incident, after meeting the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), her father returned home distraught. Her uncle, Yasir, asked him, "Is it him?" and Ḥuyayy replied, "Yes, by Allah, it is him." When asked what he would do, Ḥuyayy responded grimly, "I will be his enemy as long as I live." Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا), who overheard this exchange, never forgot it.

Despite being the daughter of one of Islam's fiercest opponents, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) herself did not inherit her father's enmity. She grew up observing the political shifts in Yathrib, including the expulsion of Banu al-Naḍir after they violated their treaty with the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم). Her family relocated to Khaybar, a fertile and fortified Jewish settlement to the north, where they continued their resistance to the Muslim community.

In her youth, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was married twice—first to Sallam ibn Mishkam, and later to Kinanah ibn al-Rabi, both members of the Jewish elite in Khaybar. Though her early life was marked by social privilege and tribal solidarity, it would soon be tested by the tides of conflict between her people and the rising Islamic state.

As tensions escalated and the political landscape changed, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) would be thrust into the heart of history. The very upbringing that had given her pride and identity would soon collide with the realities of war, loss, and—ultimately—spiritual awakening.

LIFE BEFORE MARRIAGE TO THE PROPHET (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم)

The early adulthood of Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was defined by sharp contrasts—nobility and trauma, privilege and captivity, resistance and eventual faith. Born into the political and religious elite of Banu al-Naḍir. Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) spent her formative years among leaders who openly opposed the message of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم). But even as her tribe was exiled from Madinah and resettled in Khaybar, her own destiny would prove far more complex than a mere reflection of tribal hostility.

After her tribe's expulsion from Madinah for breaching their pact with the Muslims, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) relocated with her father, Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, to Khaybar. This was not merely a refuge but a fortress—an agriculturally rich region filled with fortified castles and thriving markets. It soon became the new stronghold of Jewish opposition to the Muslims. There, she married Kinanah ibn al-Rabi, one of the wealthiest and most prominent figures among the Jewish tribes of Khaybar. Though the marriage may have been politically strategic, it placed her firmly at the center of opposition to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم).

In 7 AH (629 CE), after enduring betrayal and threats from various quarters, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) led an expedition to Khaybar to secure Madinah and bring peace to the northern trade routes. The Battle of Khaybar ended in a decisive Muslim victory. Several fortresses fell one after another, and resistance was eventually subdued.

Tragically for Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا), her husband Kinanah was killed during the campaign, and her father was also among those executed for instigating war and treachery. In the aftermath, she was among the captives taken by the Muslims—stripped of wealth, family, and status in a matter of days. She was now a widow and prisoner in the camp of the very people her family had long opposed.

But what might have become a life of despair was redirected by divine wisdom. When the captives were brought before the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), Ṣafiyyah's noble demeanor, refined speech, and graceful bearing did not go unnoticed. Companions recognized her elevated background, and Dihyah al-Kalbi (رضئ الله تعالى عنه) initially requested her as his share of the spoils. However, when informed of her unique status and lineage, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) offered to free her and honor her with marriage, should she choose it.

Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was presented with the choice: remain a free woman or accept the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) proposal. She chose the latter. In that moment, she stepped away from the ashes of loss and into a new identity—not as a defeated captive, but as a believing woman and consort of Allah's Apostle (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم). The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) then set her free and married her, thus elevating her from war's humiliation to prophetic companionship.

The marriage was solemnized while returning from Khaybar. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) ordered a simple walimah (marriage feast), in which dates, barley, and clarified butter were served to the Companions. This marked the transformation of Ṣafiyyah's (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) life: from grief and displacement to healing, faith, and belonging.

It is said that during the journey back to Madinah, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) accepted Islam sincerely. She abandoned not only the gods of her forefathers but also the political resentments that had defined her family's legacy. She now walked a path of devotion, prepared to live not as a symbol of conquest, but as a Mother of the Believers, chosen not in triumph, but in mercy.

LIFE AS A WIFE OF THE PROPHET (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم)

When Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) entered the household of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), she brought with her a past unlike any of his other wives. She was a woman of high lineage, descended from Prophet Haroon (عليه السلام), but she was also a convert from a people who had once fiercely opposed the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم). Yet the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), as he always did, looked beyond the circumstances of history and recognized the heart before him—a woman of dignity, grace, and sincerity.

Her marriage to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) was marked not by pageantry but by tenderness and prophetic care. On the journey back from Khaybar, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) stopped with the caravan to rest. As Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) approached, still adjusting to her new life, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) gently spread his cloak for her to sit on—a sign not only of affection, but of the honor he bestowed upon her. It was a gesture of inclusion, a quiet announcement to the world that this woman was now his wife and his companion.

Upon arriving in Madinah, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) took her place among the Mothers of the Believers. Though her path to Islam was unique, and her background foreign to many in Madinah, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) affirmed her dignity at every turn. He advised his other wives to treat her well, and he addressed any tension within the household with wisdom and fairness. At times, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was mocked for her Jewish origins, but the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) always defended her.

Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was known for her beauty, intelligence, and softness of speech. She was also deeply devoted to worship, and over time, she became fully integrated into the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) household. Despite the unique challenges of being a newcomer among the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) wives, her manners, patience, and piety eventually won over many hearts.

During the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) final illness, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) stood by his side with unwavering loyalty. It is reported in Sahih Muslim that during his last days, when his wives were gathered around him, Ṣafiyyah said with tears in her eyes: *"O Apostle of Allah, I wish it were I who was suffering in your place."* The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), moved by her sincerity, acknowledged her words with affection.

LIFE AFTER THE PROPHET (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم)

Following the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) death in 11 AH, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) continued to reside in Madinah, living a life of devotion, modesty, and seclusion as prescribed for the Mothers of the Believers. She participated neither in public affairs nor in religious polemics. Her character reflected her deep inner focus and unwavering faith. Despite her relatively quiet public role, she remained a figure of reverence, visited by scholars and the righteous who sought to learn from those who had known the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) intimately.

Hadith literature preserves several narrations from her, especially concerning the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) final days and his personal character. These few but precious insights are part of the authenticated traditions recorded in the major compilations of Ahadith.

Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was also known for her generosity and piety. She maintained a good relationship with many of the Companions. One illuminating report mentions that during the siege of Uthman ibn Affan (رضئ الله تعالى عنه), when rebels surrounded the Caliph's house, Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) tried to reach him with food and water. When she was blocked from doing so, she turned back in grief—an act that reflected her loyalty to the truth and her courage in the face of disorder, even as an elderly woman. Her allegiance, like her faith, remained firm.

As the decades passed, she outlived many of her contemporaries. During the rule of Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan (رضئ الله تعالى عنه), Ṣafiyyah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) passed away, most likely around 50 AH (670 CE). The reports of her funeral reflect the respect she had earned in the hearts of the people. She was buried in Jannat al-Baqi, the sacred cemetery in Madinah where many of the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) family and companions were laid to rest.